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# ART AND PROGRESS

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## THE PROMISE OF ENGLISH PORTRAIT PAINTING

BY T. MARTIN WOOD

**G**REAT portrait painters are rare. The portrait painter must possess qualities that are not generally referred to as artistic—though all qualities are artistic that find expression in a work of art. He must be in possession of as many worldly instincts as a man of the world, if the world is his subject. Men must be as open books before

him, as they have been before Mr. Sargent. His art will be resented as Mr. Sargent's was resented—perhaps not wrongly, for desire for flattery is not ignoble, it implies appreciation of ideals. But the uncompromising art of Mr. Sargent, which is almost the greatest that we have, has paid compliments worth more than any paid within a former cen-

ture, mirroring everything that has been mirrored. The world, however, had become disenchanted before Mr. Sargent came upon the scene. To have such a magnificent portrait as Van Dyck's Charles I, without belief in the divinity of the rights of kings, is quite impossible.

In portraiture everything becomes a background to the human face, and great portraits have always recreated the glamor of a moment. Not for a single moment can the significance of a figure be conceived, as the fashionable photographer conceives it, as something apart from its surrounding. And character, with which portraiture is primarily concerned, is largely an indoor plant; in the conditions of many people's lives a rather hot-house affair, not quite natural enough to be seen in a purely natural light. In any case under a studio light the intimacy of natural drama often fails to break. The importance of environment in portraiture is inestimable; it means far more than a successful arrangement of harmoniously colored furniture behind the sitter. The irrelevant in color extends to the symbolism of color, and there is, too, a color of the day, even of the indoor day. Intimately like this is everything co-related and nothing that is hidden left without an outer symbol. It is passion alone that makes visible the mist of associations in which a rose hangs, and in which a white hand moves. Everything must be like this to the artist; he must reflect the spirit of everything, and to receive the reflection of the invisible, the mirror must be held up to nature.

Let us examine the three great influences that have affected English portraiture of the present time. We shall find them in Sargent, Whistler, and Manet.

Mr. Sargent's influence has been somewhat mitigated by the appearance of facility in his work. In his case it is only an appearance, but great is the confusion in the public mind between facility and a spontaneous touch.

The influence of Whistler has been great, but slightly cheapened in trans-

mission. His conception of color, as an escape from colors, has not been understood, his process of elimination has been too recondite for taste less perfect than his own. Whistler's appeal, like the appeal of much Japanese art, was made too much to the mere appetite of good taste; it thus belonged to the region of superficialities, both actually, as nothing but decoration, and metaphorically as well. It was Whistler, however, who broke the spell of conventional composition in England.

Infatuation with the memory of Manet has been the other influence, an infatuation beautifully expressed in George Moore's prose and finding expression in the picture by Mr. Orpen, which is reproduced. Manet was, of all artists, the most purely artistic. With him art was self-indulgence, sometimes delicate and more often voluptuous, but always expressive of a new spirit, of self-expression finding wings, of the beginning of revaluations. And it was only yesterday that everything in the world seemed to be beginning over again—yesterday that a new freedom was exultingly assumed, in the blissful forgetfulness that vulgarity, too, would have this right of self-expression.

In illustration of the force of these influences upon present trend of portrait painting in Great Britain certain portraits are reproduced herewith. It will be noted that in every instance something beyond the obvious has been represented. In Mr. Wilson Steer's art, and only a little less in Mr. Orpen's, the thrill of daylight is encountered. But it is somewhat in vain we look into their radiant canvases for great things, the grace distilled of women's presence, and the omnipresence of beauty. Mr. Lavery's art was long ago enslaved to feminine charm, but without a pretty face it fails to signify. What we are waiting for is an art that does not let fall the most human sentiments when face to face with the problems with which Mr. Wilson Steer alone has not compromised. The painter's old stock-in-trade is discredited in real sunlight, and old methods are drag-



WHITE ROSES

J. S. LAVERY

PURCHASED FOR THE NEW ART GALLERY AT JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA



MRS. HAMMERSLEY

P. WILSON STEER

ging out a discredited existence, saved only here by the grace of such emotional reconstruction as they receive, for instance, from Mr. C. H. Shannon's hands. We are waiting for "the genius of the heart" to change its quarters, and end the monopoly of cold intelligence in regions of the light.

There can be no more highly interesting task than to examine the art of portraiture just as it passes into a new phase in England, and to find reflections in it

of every tendency in current art. In the future the art of portraiture must be studied in a new light, and this new light is transcending daylight.

With the final abandonment of the supreme pictorial convention of ancient art—a conventional relationship of light to shade—a new tomorrow dawns. Hereafter surfaces will no longer be viewed as thrown up into the light from a region of darkness; darkness itself will only be felt as a moderation in a region of light—



PORTRAIT GROUP

WILLIAM ORPEN

This picture has a peculiar interest. The persons in the group portrayed, under the famous picture of Mlle. Gonzales by Manet, are (seated, reading from right to left) Mr. George Moore, novelist and critic, Mr. P. Wilson Steer, Sir Hugh Lane and Professor Tonks of The Slade School, and (standing) Mr. D. S. MacColl, Director of the National Gallery at Milbanke (The Tate Gallery), formerly art critic of the "Saturday Review," and Mr. Walter Sickert, painter and critic, Whistler's most famous pupil. It was painted three or four years ago.

a feeling clearly enough connected up with modern aspiration in quite other walks of life, and a view expressive of the wish at the heart of the present moment that all theatricality may be aban-

doned. Heretofore mystery pertained to darkness, and now our welcome is extended to the mystery of light.

But let us bring this thought back again strictly to painting, and let us



MRS. HARRISON

GERALD KELLY

take the work of an artist in some respects most significant—Mr. Wilson Steer. Now Mr. Steer is far too objective and unemotional to bring the problem of his own method to its own solution, but he has given a momentousness to the play of light hitherto almost undreamed of. His figures arise and their dresses settle into folds iridescent with reflections and fluent with light that moves from surface to surface. It all began long ago with Watteau, but that was only the beginning, “set-pieces” of foliage were then in use, as aids to com-

position, intercepting instead of conducting the light, holding it up in one place, releasing it in another, for in those days the management of light was carried out as if it was the management of water.

During the nineteenth century, thanks to the three great influences that we have cited, we in England were saved from a realism which had not failed to show its terrors, and which was as baulking to the aspirations of human genius as the materialism, its counterpart, at the same

time in the scientific world. It was not the age of darkness, but certainly it was not the age of light, and if that is the new age, it seems not yet to have occurred to us that nothing will look more pitiable in the light we covet than the tinsel of our old perfections, once so glorious in effect within the medieval semi-darkness. That which was once right, is the only thing that is ever right, is true if art stands still and aspiration is suspended. It is true, if they are right who think that art has been displaced by science—life by grammar!

Our wide windows of today have flooded rooms with light, the character of our imagination will respond, it is affected by environment. How does the old furniture of art appear in such illumination, and the traditions that once seemed so resplendent in castle-window light? The curtain and the pillar, no one loves them as I love them, but impressionism, and we use the word in its widest sense, must not come near them, their glory fades at the touch of the morning light. It does not interest us to find a modern picture a meeting

ground for an assortment of old conventions; all of different periods, and not one of them at home in its native light; it is precisely this that is vulgarity. The old now is separated from the new in life, the old world lies behind a barricade of whirling steel. The severance is no less distinct in art. But do not let us take refuge in such terms as the "New Art" and "New Thought," these can mean nothing, Art and Thought are of the same age exactly; they are, of course, as old as the world, and whatever else they can be they can never be new. New directions! Ah! yes, we welcome them, we who have not cultivated the bedside manner, or imagined that we stood beside the deathbed of great art. And who do not regard science as an heir—but as an explanation. The flaw that showed in *L'Art Nouveau*—and the movement unconsciously ascended to the wall picture—was insincerity. Just as everything else in art is insincere that is an intellectual performance from beginning to end. For beauty is only visible as an enchantment and as projecting temperamental feeling.

## DOCENT SERVICE

### TEACHING OF AND BY WORKS OF ART; ITS WEAKNESS AND ITS STRENGTH

BY BENJAMIN IVES GILMAN

I. The term Docent Service was invented to mean the effort of seeking to make tangible works of art known to others.

A work of art may be known in two ways: in itself and as an index to other things. Its complete exposition consists of two operations: first, that of causing the beholder to grasp the intention of the artist therein; second, that of causing him to grasp truths which this intention reveals. Interpreting the artist is the foundation of exposition; interpreting the work its superstructure.

Hence, there are two factors in Docent Service. It aims to induce others, first,

to partake of the feast for senses, mind and heart set before them in a work of art; and second, to go forward in the strength of this meat into the universe beyond. By the first aim the Docent is the coadjutor of the artist; by the second, of the scientist, the craftsman and the moralist.

Before the institution of Docent Service instruction upon objects of art in museums did not in general represent teaching of art at all, but only teaching *by* it. It was not concrete but abstract instruction aiming not at enjoyment but enlightenment. It did not seek to awaken appreciation through companion-